

**Puget Sound Partnership  
Emerging Action Agenda Themes for  
Discussion by the Ecosystem Coordination Board  
May 28, 2008**

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**Background**

On June 12-13, 2008 the Leadership Council will discuss and confirm initial priorities for the Action Agenda. These priorities will then be discussed and refined over the summer with the public and stakeholders, as well as used by state agencies to help set budget actions. In preparation for the Leadership Council discussion, the Puget Sound Partnership will discuss four emerging themes for action with the Ecosystem Coordination Board.

All four themes are the basis for an overall ecosystem-based management approach for Puget Sound recovery. The themes should be considered as part of the overarching needs for the ecosystem, and will need to be tailored to reflect local conditions around the region. In addition to addressing these themes, an ecosystem approach to Puget Sound will need to include accountability, adaptive management, and monitoring, as well as funding. These needs will be discussed as separate agenda items at the Ecosystem Coordination Board meeting.

**Principles for Choosing Priority Strategies**

Through the work of the topic forums and action area meetings, the following high-level principles have been identified to help determine priority strategies, issues and/or geographic areas for work.

- Strategies should address threats with the highest **magnitude** of impact.
- Efforts should address threats with the highest level of **urgency**. (How imminent is the threat; will it result in an irreversible loss; how resilient are the resources that are affected?)
- Actions must have a reasonable certainty of **effectiveness**.
- Solutions must **address the processes** that form and sustain ecosystems rather than focusing narrowly on fixing individual sites.
- Instead of reacting after the damage has been done, **proactive** solutions are needed to address threats at their origin.
- We cannot afford to look at problems separately, and we need to **address multiple threats and their interactions**.
- Preserve or enhance our ability to **use and enjoy goods and services** (many benefits to many interests).
- **Consider geographic location and ecological function** when addressing threats and identifying opportunities for action.
- **Watch out for unintended consequences**. Evaluate strategies so that actions to address one problem do not cause harm to other ecosystem functions and resources.

## **The Four Emerging Themes**

The Action Area meetings, topic forums, and other discussions over the last few months were designed to help formulate a suite of actions that, if implemented, will move us to a healthy Puget Sound by 2020. We have looked at the issue in two ways. First, we are in the process of defining what is necessary overall to re-establish Puget Sound health. Second, we have tried to determine the smartest way to begin our effort. Through this process the following four themes have emerged as the issues that require immediate attention:

### **Theme A: Protect ecologically important places now**

***Place a special emphasis on protecting high quality ecological function, process, and structure for both upland and marine areas.***

Rationale: Damage to and loss of the foundational ecological function, processes, and structure from human activities is an overarching threat in Puget Sound. Urbanization impacts wildlife habitat, flows of fresh water, the volume of stormwater runoff that carries pollutants to water, groundwater infiltration, and many other ecosystem functions. Protection of land cover is critical for making improvements in water quality. Protection of high quality ecological areas is less expensive and more effective than trying to repair or recreate damaged areas. Critical to our ability to protect resources will be encouraging density in urban areas, protecting rural working lands, and avoiding sprawl.

#### Discussion question:

- How do we ensure that Puget Sound protection and recovery is considered when making decisions about land use and growth patterns?

### **Theme B: Implement restoration projects that provide high ecological benefit**

***Many plans already identify high priority areas for action and need to be implemented from an ecosystem perspective.***

Rationale: Protection of remaining habitat alone – while critical - will not be adequate to sustain the health of Puget Sound. We must also improve currently degraded conditions. We must restore critical components of the ecosystem that have the potential to contribute the most to recovery. We need to consider sequence, function, and geographic scale when undertaking restoration efforts.

#### Discussion question:

- Given an ecosystem perspective, how should we approach restoration differently?

**Theme C: Reduce water pollution with a special emphasis on stormwater runoff**  
***Reduce loadings of pollutants so we have clean fresh and marine waters***

Rationale: Poor water quality is a key threat to the health of Puget Sound. Pollution of our waters impacts human health (primarily from eating contaminated fish and shellfish) and species. We have legacy toxics problems from PCBs, DDT, and others contaminants. We continue to pour more harmful toxics, nutrients, and pathogens into our waters via stormwater runoff and our wastewater treatment systems. We have emerging problems from new chemicals without standards and effective treatment.

Discussion question:

- How can we create a system that addresses a) the complexity of pollutant threats (e.g., toxics, nutrients, and pathogens) and b) the diversity of point and non-point source pathways from the built environment, new construction, rural areas, and working lands (e.g., stormwater runoff, wastewater treatment systems)?

**Theme D: Build an accountable system for success**

***Implement system accountability and redesign how we approach protection and restoration of Puget Sound.***

Rationale: We currently have a fragmented and uncoordinated approach to protecting and restoring Puget Sound. This includes separate programs and planning processes for natural resources and utilities with layers of different (and sometimes conflicting) standards, regulations, incentives, enforcement, technical assistance, and outreach activities. Our tools were not designed to sustain the ecosystem as a whole. We do not have the ability to prioritize across actions and locations for work; programs and plans are not consistently implemented; and we are not set up to learn from our efforts and adjust actions when needed. Fundamental changes are needed in how we go about the business of restoring Puget Sound.

Discussion question:

1. What mechanisms are needed to build a system that will prioritize work, have consistent implementation of plans and programs, and enable us to learn continuously and make needed adjustments?